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**2016/2017 PROCEEDINGS OF MONTHLY RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM**  
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## **Creating a Culture of Comfort in the Classroom: Application of a Qualitative Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Ethnically diverse nursing students face unique challenges and stressors in the academic environment. Comfort as it is culturally defined and contextually influenced may provide relief from stressors. Faculty understanding of diverse nursing student comfort care needs may improve educational outcomes. The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic study was to examine the culture care meaning of comfort for ethnically diverse nursing students in the academic setting. The study was guided by the Culture Care Theory (CCT) and used the ethnographic research method. Interviews, field notes of observations, and participant comfort artifacts were used to understand the meaning of comfort for diverse nursing students. Five themes emerged and resulted in action recommendations to guide nurse educators in the provision of culturally congruent nursing care for ethnically diverse nursing students.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this presentation was to present action recommendations to guide educators in the provision of culturally congruent comfort care for ethnically diverse undergraduate students in the educational environment.

### **BACKGROUND**

Ethnically diverse undergraduate nursing students face unique challenges and stressors in the academic environment (Amaro, Abriam-Yago, & Yoder, 2006; Evans, 2004; Gilchrist & Rector, 2007; Veal, Bull, & Miller, 2012). Comfort as it is culturally defined and contextually influenced may provide relief from stressors. Culturally diverse students may benefit from the promotion of comfort as they strive to cope with challenges associated with learning in a cultural environment different from their own. Nursing faculty should be educated to preserve and maintain comfort care needs which may impact retention of culturally diverse students. An ethnographic research study of the culture care meaning of comfort supports this understanding and

consequently may improve the educational outcomes for culturally diverse nursing students.

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### **METHOD**

The researcher conducted a qualitative ethnographic study to examine the culture care meaning of comfort for ethnically diverse nursing students in the academic setting. The study was guided by Leininger's Culture Care Theory (CCT) (Leininger, 1991) and used the ethnographic research method (1991; McFarland, & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015). Data were collected in several forms. Twenty-one key and general informants participated in semi-structured interviews; key informants also identified personal artifacts that represented comfort. In addition, the researcher was an observer at student nurse association meetings, and an observer and participant in a nursing classroom. Transcribed audio-tapes, field notes, and participant comfort artifacts were analyzed using Leininger's four phases of analysis and qualitative criteria (Leininger, 1991;2006).The criteria used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research were: credibility, confirmability, meaning-in-context, recurrent patterning, saturation, and transferability.

### **FINDINGS**

Five themes supported by 13 patterns identify similar and diverse expressions of comfort care. The first three themes with patterns and supporting quotes are presented (Table 1).

**Table 1. Themes 1 through 3 with Patterns and Quotes**

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Themes	Patterns
1.The desire to be cared for as a distinct human being within the context of ethnic differences[academic atmosphere]	<p>Cared for beyond the student role</p> <p>Cultural approach to course content</p> <p>Judged or singled out by faculty</p> <p>Faculty care, support, respect, and responsiveness</p> <p>Making connections to navigate college</p>
<p>“I need to know how to make it through the program, you know, how to be able to organize work and just referring me to other people that are around school to help you...than helped a lot- just giving me other information besides just handing out the syllabus”</p>	
2. Being ethnically diverse influences expressions of comfort {classroom setting]	<p>Need for acceptance and recognition</p> <p>Withholding feelings and expressions</p> <p>Self-preparation beyond expectations</p>
<p>Withholding feelings and expression</p> <p>“I am not sure who to approach for help [in the nursing lab] and I may look for that one person who helps all the time but if she's not there then I usually won't ask”</p> <p>Self-preparation beyond expectations</p> <p>“ I feel like I have to fight harder, like not even academically wise, just mentally, mentally and emotionally like, I feel like I have to be suited up per se, like ready to be able to go in [the classroom] and deal with that”</p>	
Identification with cultural practices and values promotes feelings of comfort, as well as discomfort	<p>Cultural connections</p> <p>Racial stereotyping</p>
<p>“Having to work with ethnically diverse students I think some people who maybe have never been exposed to ethnically diverse people judge them based on stereotype”</p> <p>“...talks about the inner city in a negative way”</p>	

## APPLICATION TO NURSING EDUCATION

### Recommendations

CCT decision and action recommendations developed from the themes and patterns guide nurse educators in providing culturally congruent nursing care for ethnically diverse nursing students. The action recommendations can be applied to most higher education classroom settings (Table 2). Recommendations are made to 1) preserve or maintain actions of comfort care that are currently successful (Culture Care Preservation/Maintenance); 2) accommodate the comfort care needs of the diverse student while considering curriculum requirements and academic obligations (Culture Care Accommodation and negotiation); and 3) demonstrate professional actions that can promote better outcomes for diverse students in academic environment (Culture Care Re-patterning and Restructuring).

### Non- Diverse Faculty

Faculty understanding of diverse student comfort care needs may improve educational outcomes. Several recommendations for faculty who are non- diverse are to a) be present, open, and genuine; b) use a different lens to view the world of the students; c) appreciate differences and use the knowledge of these differences to enhance learning opportunities for both faculty and students (Bednarz, Schim, Doorenbos, 2008); d) consider self-assessment about the breadth and depth of knowledge about cultural diversity and e) acknowledge differences and find common ground with students. When trust is established-both the faculty and student feel comfortable to exchange personal and life experiences that have formed their opinions of the world (Leininger, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

Patterns of comfort care are expressed similarly and differently, depending on the students' precollege cultural factors. Nurse educators may take a culturally congruent approach by applying the recommendations to enhance comfort for ethnically diverse nursing students. Enhancing comfort in the educational setting as it is culturally defined may contribute to retention of ethnically diverse nursing students, who will ultimately practice nursing care for a culturally diverse population of patients.

### Keywords

Comfort, culture care theory, ethnonursing research, nursing education, diverse nursing students

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**Table 2. Recommendations**

Culture Care Preservation (Keep what's working)	Culture Care Accommodation (Compromise – What's negotiable)	Culture Care Re-patterning (Change for better outcomes)
<p>*Address students by name</p> <p>Inquire about family members</p> <p>*Ask about specific traditions</p> <p>* an open, genuine, caring attitude</p> <p>*Faculty self - assessment of cultural knowledge</p> <p>*Appreciate differences in students, (Bednarz, Schim, Doorenbos, (2010)</p> <p>*Connect diverse students to appropriate programs</p>	<p>*Provide examples in the classroom that are applicable to the students' life and culture.</p> <p>*Ask students for input about caring for people from their culture</p> <p>*Ask students about obstacles related to balancing work, home, family, school; assist with problem solving and finding solutions</p> <p>*Assist with making connections assisting diverse students to find others on campus who share their diversity</p> <p>*Assigning students to small groups in which they feel comfortable</p> <p>*Understand that for some individuals comfort means socializing with members of their own culture (Smith et al., 2007)</p>	<p>*Ask students (one on one) what they feel comfortable sharing</p> <p>*Call on them in class to share experiences</p> <p>*Exhibit genuine appreciation for the students' contributions</p> <p>Challenge inaccurate statements, stereotypical responses and bias from other students and faculty</p> <p>*Support open respectful interaction in the classroom between students and faculty</p> <p>*Promote campus wide events that celebrate diversity</p> <p>*Request money for faculty and staff development in the areas of culturally congruent care</p>

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